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Confessions of a former MIT admissions director - The Boston Globe

OPINION | MCGREGGOR CROWLEY

Confessions of a former MIT admissions director

By McGreggor Crowley March 13, 2019, 6:51 p.m.

EXHIBIT

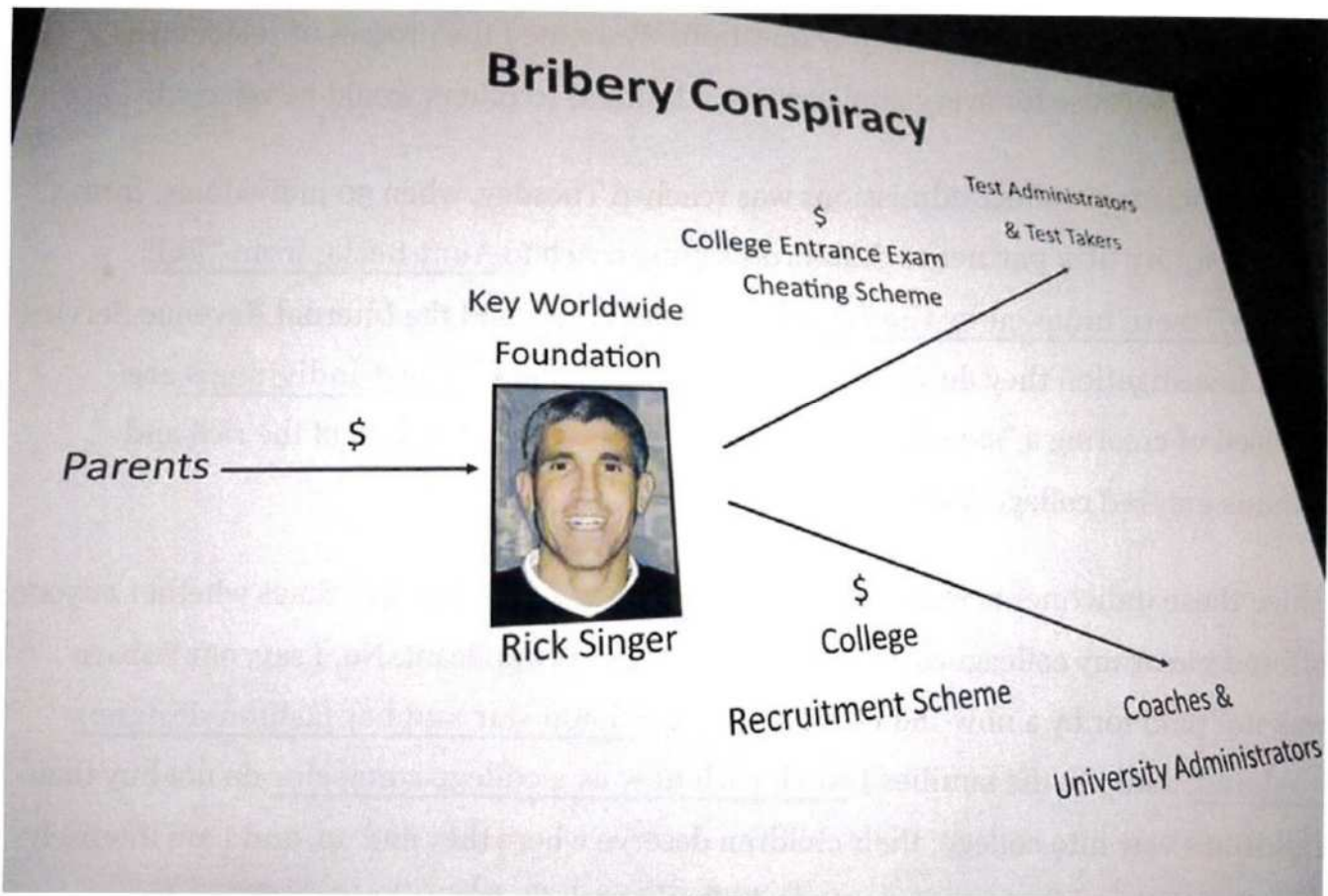
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Witness: McGreggor Crowley, M.D.

10/11/2023

Michelle Keegan, RMR, CRR, CSR



William "Rick" Singer has pleaded guilty to being at the center of the college admissions bribery scheme. STEVE SENNE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

WHEN I APPLIED to college 24 years ago, I felt very much alone. Living in a mobile home outside of San Antonio, Tex., my family knew little about the complexities of preparing for the SAT or the importance of extracurricular experiences in college admissions.

Instead of applying to a carefully curated list of reach, target, and likely schools, I applied to universities I had seen in my favorite movies, like “Real Genius.” I managed to make it into one of them – Massachusetts Institute of Technology, carried both by my obliviousness and a generous financial aid package.

After graduation, I worked in [MIT’s Office of Admissions](#), drawn there by loyalty and by a desire to advocate for those of us who are the first in our families to go to college. During those nearly a dozen wonderful years crafting our undergraduate community, I had the privilege of working with admissions officers and varsity coaches whose sterling ethics and standards I would never question. We treated the process of selection as a solemnity, because for every applicant we admitted, 10 others would be rejected.

Peak cynicism in college admissions was reached Tuesday, when 50 individuals, from a private equity firm partner to Stanford’s sailing coach to [Aunt Becky from “Full House,”](#) [were indicted by the Department of Justice](#) and the Internal Revenue Service in an investigation they dubbed “Operation Varsity Blues.” [These individuals](#) are accused of creating a “side door” through which dozens of children of the rich and famous entered college fraudulently.

Since these indictments were unsealed, I have been asked multiple times whether anyone offered me or my colleagues an incentive to admit an applicant. No, I say, our Subaru was not paid for by a now-indicted [former television star and her fashion designer husband](#). And no, the families I [work with now as a college counselor](#) do not buy their children’s way into college; their children deserve where they end up, and I am intensely proud of their achievements, earned wholly through their own hard work.

What about university donors, though? Don’t they have an unfair advantage in this process? In truth, for every office of admissions there is a development office that builds a university’s endowment through donations from alumni and wealthy individuals. And every year, regardless of what a college or university says publicly, a number of children

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of wealthy donors and alumni get a nod in their direction while other applicants are rejected.

The reality is, the money generated by admitting wealthy students often serves to subsidize the financial aid of those less fortunate. If one squints, one might see here a karmic balance enabling many students to attend a college they otherwise could never afford.

Admissions is painful for everyone involved. Even though I oversaw the selection process at MIT, we rejected many kids whose applications I had fallen in love with. We admitted by committee, after all, and I was but one voice in a roomful of many colleagues. I always got attached, and decisions we made still sting me to this day.

There are simply too many exceptional students in the world, and while the demand for “elite” institutions continues to rise, the number of available beds at these schools remains stagnant. This is why Stanford has a 4 percent admission rate and why applying to college is so stress-inducing for applicants, their families, and the admissions officers that end up eventually rejecting them.

In an awful coincidence, while news of this nationwide admissions pay-for-play conspiracy develops, many American colleges and universities are announcing their admissions decisions for the year. I can’t help but worry about those families who already feel hopeless and helpless in this process.

The best advice I can give you, Mom and Dad, is to remember that it’s really not about you. Nor is it about others’ perceptions of your family. This mentality only feeds the beast that is contemporary college admissions, and when you embrace it, you risk bringing an unhealthy stress into your household.

Your kid is tremendous and resilient and smart and creative, and she will go to a wonderful school that’s just right for *her*, not you. Take a deep breath, don’t write your

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kid's essays, and please never call an admissions office and pretend to be your child. We know it's you, and we sometimes make little notes when do you so.

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